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Domestic Political Competition and Triangular Interaction Among Washington, Beijing, and Taipei: The U.S. China Policy*

YU-SHAN WU

Empirical evidence has shown that domestic political competition has a great impact on triangular interaction among Washington, Beijing, and Taipei. How do policymakers play the domestic game and the international triangular game concurrently and expect to maximize their payoffs? This paper examines the relevant literature and proposes a refined sequential model to analyze the China policy of the United States since 1980. The hypothesis is that domestic political competition determines external policy during election periods. In between elections, triangular strategic calculation dominates. Specifically, the quadrennial presidential elections provide opportunities for challengers to attack the incumbent president's realist China policy, thus bringing pressure for a change of the existing policy. Whether such an attack takes place hinges on the combinations of the idealist and realist images of the PRC in the United States. Attack will occur only when the two images diverge and the president does not preempt

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YU-SHAN WU (吳玉山) is a Research Fellow and Director of the Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica, and Jointly Appointed Professor in Political Science, National Taiwan University. His major interests are in comparative socialist transitions (both political and economic), semi-presidentialism in nascent democracies, and U.S.-PRC-ROC relations. He can be reached at <yushanwu@gate.sinica.edu.tw>.

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the issue. Seven presidential elections since 1980 are examined to test this refined model. The findings will be integrated into a composite framework to analyze interaction among Washington, Beijing, and Taipei.

KEYWORDS: **U.S. China policy; cross-Strait relations; strategic triangle; domestic politics; foreign policy.**

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The Taiwan Strait is one of the most dangerous areas in the post-Cold War world.[1] Even though the tension there has not yet reached boiling point (despite coming dangerously close to it in the 1995-96 missile scare), the possibility of a direct military confrontation over Taiwan (the Republic of China) between the United States, the world's hegemon, and its regional challenger, the People's Republic of China (PRC), is genuine enough and its consequences dire enough for the international community to pay great attention to the development of cross-Strait relations. It is interesting to note that even though the subject matter is relations between Taiwan and mainland China, one needs to look beyond the interaction of the dyad to find the momentum that drives these bilateral relations. The United States plays such a pivotal role that cross-Strait relations cannot be fully understood without viewing them in a Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle. When the three players interact in that triangle, they do not just respond to each others' moves. They operate in at least two games: the interaction game and the domestic game in which the leaders act to mobilize their political support at home. Oftentimes the domestic dimension is more important than the interactive dimension; that is, trilateral relations are less about how the three players treat each other than about how political leaders use the relations for their domestic benefit. Political moves geared ostensibly toward the other side are actually for domestic consumption. One finds this phenomenon in all three players.

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[1] See Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, ed., *Dangerous Strait: The U.S.-Taiwan-China Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

How can we capture the pattern of movement of cross-Strait and triangular relations? How do we know particular policies are geared toward domestic audiences, while others are tuned to other actors? How do domestic and international factors interact and compete in defining the path of cross-Strait and triangular relations? What determines the relative strength of domestic and international forces when they diverge? These are the core questions that this paper seeks to answer.

We will first briefly review the literature on cross-Strait and triangular relations, then come up with a sequential model that puts domestic political contestation and international power games in place, and finally examine the empirical evidence to test and modify the theory. We will see how domestic competition and international realpolitik take turns to determine policy, and how political leaders behave differently when they perceive different incentive structures in the games they are playing. This paper will focus on the impact of the U.S. presidential elections on U.S. China policy since 1980.[2] A total of seven presidential elections are reviewed. We will modify the crude sequential model and propose a refined version. The new theory will treat the realist image and the idealist image of China as independent variables, and identify the mechanism through which the various combinations of the two images determine whether the China issue will be raised in a presidential election, and whether the incumbent president's China policy will be attacked by his challenger. The ultimate purpose is to integrate the findings here with those from the research on Taiwan and mainland China, so as to form an analytical framework for the study of the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle.

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[2]We will not review the period prior to the 1980 presidential campaign in this paper for lack of space. However, to apply the theoretical formulation established in this paper to the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations in the late 1960s through the 1970s is challenging and may prove rewarding. For example, it can be argued that Nixon's failure to attack the Democratic administration's China policy in 1968 was owing to the coincidence of China's realist and idealist images at the time, and that Carter's shift to realpolitik toward China occurred in the inter-electoral period, when he was temporarily immune from electoral pressure. Hence both the Nixon and Carter cases bear out the main theme of this paper. This author wishes to thank an anonymous reviewer for the suggestion of extending the investigation back to the late 1960s and 1970s.

The Literature

Of the vast literature covering cross-Strait and triangular relations, the majority is descriptive or prescriptive in nature, interested primarily in presenting facts as the authors see them, or advocating policies that presumably can alleviate problems or advance desirable goals. Valuable as they are in their own right, works in either the descriptive or prescriptive tradition are not interested in developing theories that are generally applicable to cross-Strait or triangular relations or to structurally similar relations.[3] For the few theories we have in the field, one can find three main approaches.[4] The first approach concentrates on the interaction between Taiwan and mainland China. Here one finds divided-nation theories,[5] the integrationist model,[6] the power asymmetry approach,[7] and game theories.[8] The second approach emphasizes domestic politics, and

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[3]Three prominent works that are descriptive in nature are Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992: Uncertain Friendship* (New York: Twayne, 1994); John W. Garver, *Face Off: China, the United States, and Taiwan's Democratization* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); and Wang Ming-yi, *Buqueding de haixia: dang Zhonghua minguo pengshang Zhonghua renmin gongheguo* (Uncertain Strait: when the Republic of China meets the People's Republic of China) (Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1993).

[4]See Wu Yu-Shan, "Zhengbian zhong de liang'an guanxi lilun" (Contending theories in the study of cross-Straits relations), in *Zhengbian zhong de liang'an guanxi lilun* (Contending theories in the study of cross-Straits relations), ed. Bau Tzong-Ho and Wu Yu-Shan (Taipei: Wunan, 2004), 3.

[5]See, for example, Jaushieh Joseph Wu, ed., *Divided Nations: The Experience of Germany, Korea, and China* (Taipei: Institute of International Relations, 1995); and Yung Wei, "Recognition of Divided States: Implication and Application of Concepts of 'Multi-System Nations,' 'Political Entities,' and 'Intra-National Commonwealth'," *The International Lawyer* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 997-1011.

[6]See, for example, Wu Hsin-hsing, *Zhenghe lilun yu liang'an guanxi zhi yanjiu* (A study on integration theory and cross-Strait relations) (Taipei: Wunan, 1995); Kao Lang, "Cong zhenghe lilun tansuo liang'an zhenghe de tiaojian yu kunjing" (Exploring the conditions and dilemma of cross-Strait integration in the perspective of integration theory), in Bau and Wu, *Zhengbian zhong de liang'an guanxi lilun*, 41-75; and Chang Ya-chung, *Liang'an tonghe lun* (Thesis on cross-Strait integration) (Taipei: Shengzhi, 2000).

[7]See, for example, Wu Yu-Shan, *Kangheng huo hucong: liang'an guanxi xinquan* (Balancing or bandwagoning: cross-Strait relations revisited) (Taipei: Cheng Chung, 1997).

[8]See, for example, Jih-wen Lin and Chih-cheng Lo, "Between Sovereignty and Security: A Mixed Strategy Analysis of Current Cross-Strait Interactions," *Issues & Studies* 31, no. 3 (March 1995): 64-91; Jih-wen Lin, "Two-Level Games Between Rival Regimes: Domestic Politics and the Remaking of Cross-Strait Relations," ibid. 36, no. 6 (November/December

includes the political competition model,[9] the political economy approach,[10] and theories of political psychology.[11] The third approach concentrates on the international dimension. This is where one finds structural realism,[12] the strategic triangle,[13] and constructivist critique.[14] Valuable as

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2000): 1-26; and Brett V. Benson and Emerson M.S. Niou, "Economic Interdependence, Dependence, and Peace: A Game-Theoretical Analysis" (Paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of Chinese Association of Political Science, Tainan, Taiwan, September 18, 2004).

[9]See, for example, John Fuh-sheng Hsieh, "Chiefs, Staffs, Indians, and Others: How Was Taiwan's Mainland China Policy Made?" in *Inherited Rivalry: Conflict Across the Taiwan Straits*, ed. Tun-jen Cheng, Chi Huang, and Samuel S.G. Wu (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 137-52; Yu-Shan Wu, "Taiwanese Elections and Cross-Strait Relations: Mainland Policy in Flux," *Asian Survey* 39, no. 4 (July/August 1999): 565-87; Yu-Shan Wu, "Does Chen's Election Make Any Difference? Domestic and International Constraints on Taipei, Washington, and Beijing," in *Taiwan's Presidential Politics: Democratization and Cross-Strait Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 155-92; and Yu-Shan Wu, "Taiwan's Domestic Politics and Cross-Strait Relations," *The China Journal*, no. 53 (January 2005): 35-60.

[10]See, for example, Tse-Kang Leng, *The Taiwan-China Connection: Democracy and Development Across the Taiwan Straits* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996); Chen-yuan Tung, "Cross-Strait Economic Relations: China's Leverage and Taiwan's Vulnerability," *Issues & Studies* 39, no. 3 (September 2003): 137-75; and Leng Tse-Kang, "Dalu jingmao zhengce de genyuan: guojia yu shehui de hudong" (The source of Taiwan's economic policy toward mainland China: the interaction between the state and society), in Bau and Wu, *Zhengbian zhong de liang'an guanxi lilun*, 211-63.

[11]See, for example, Shih Chih-yu, "Zhima! Kaimen. Xinli fenxi yinling liang'an zhengce yanjiu jinru xinjingjie" (Open Sesame! Psychoanalysis leads study on cross-Strait policy to new frontier), in Bau and Wu, *Zhengbian zhong de liang'an guanxi lilun*, 265-336; T. Y. Wang and I-chou Liu, "Contending Identities in Taiwan: Implications for Cross-Strait Relations," *Asian Survey* 44, no. 4 (July/August 2004): 568-90; and Yu-Shan Wu, "Taiwanese Nationalism and Its Implications: Testing the Worst-Case Scenario," ibid., 614-25.

[12]See, for example, Ming Chu-cheng, "Guoji tixi lilun yu liang'an guanxi" (International systems theory and cross-Strait relations), in Bau and Wu, *Zhengbian zhong de liang'an guanxi lilun*, 365-88; and Amitav Acharya, "International Relations Theory and Cross-Strait Relations," *Prospect Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (October 2000): 1-23.

[13]See, for example, Bau Tzong-Ho, "Zhanlue sanjiao jiaose zhuanbian yu leixing bianhua fenxi—yi Meiguo han Taihai liang'an sanjiao hudong weili" (An analysis of role transition and type change in a strategic triangle: the case of triangular interaction between the United States and the two sides of the Taiwan Strait), in Bau and Wu, *Zhengbian zhong de liang'an guanxi lilun*, 337-63; Wu, *Kangheng huo hucong*, chap. 4; and Yu-Shan Wu, "From Romantic Triangle to Marriage? Washington-Beijing-Taipei Relations in Historical Comparison," *Issues & Studies* 41, no. 1 (March 2005): 113-59.

[14]See, for example, Li Ying-ming, *Chonggou liang'an yu shijie tuxiang* (Reconstruct cross-Strait and world image) (Taipei: Shengzhi, 2002), chap. 7; Yuan I, "Anquan dianzhi yu Mei-Zhong guanxi: yige renzhi shequnlun de fenxi jiagou" (The security regime and the U.S.-PRC relations: an analytical framework of perception community), in Bau and Wu, *Zhengbian zhong de liang'an guanxi lilun*, 389-432.

they are in shedding light on various aspects of cross-Strait and trilateral relations, their insights need to be sorted out and synthesized into verifiable hypotheses and models.[15] In this paper, we will concentrate on developing an analytical framework that can effectively deal with our core issue, i.e., the interaction of domestic and international factors in determining cross-Strait and Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangular relations.

On the domestic front, the most hopeful candidate theory to capture the relations between domestic politics and foreign policy is the political competition model. It assumes the paramount interest of policymakers is to secure their domestic power position while making foreign policy. The challengers, while criticizing the government's foreign policy, also aim to advance their power position vis-à-vis that of the incumbents. Of particular importance in this model are junctures of political contestation as determined by the rules of the political game. In democracies, those junctures are regular elections scheduled and conducted according to formal electoral rules. In authoritarian regimes, as long as there is a certain degree of political institutionalization, and political succession takes place according to specific rules, those junctures are also predictable. In short, the political competition model assumes both incumbents and challengers take positions on foreign policy during periods of political contestation in order to maximize their power. In this sense, the domestic audience is more important than the direct recipients abroad of the foreign policy designed and implemented during political contestation. The model further assumes that during the periods between political contests the positions of the incumbents are basically secure, and the need to attend to the domestic audience in making foreign policy is reduced.

The political competition model when applied to democratic politics suggests vote maximization as the main consideration of foreign policy-making during elections. This means Washington's China policy and Taiwan's mainland policy are geared toward domestic voters when elections

[15]For an overall literature survey, see Yu-Shan Wu, "Theorizing on Relations across the Taiwan Strait: Nine Contending Approaches," *Journal of Contemporary China* 9, no. 25 (2000): 407-28.

draw near. The model also suggests greater concern over domestic response by Beijing's Taiwan policymakers when the communist leadership is facing a political challenge, nowadays often rising with the advent of the National Party Congress and the National People's Congress (兩會, *lianghui*), scheduled every five years. It is true that ordinary people in China do not vote to decide their national leadership. However, the "high electorate" in the Party does determine the ultimate composition of the leadership, albeit with much behind-the-scenes political maneuvering prior to the final decision.[16] This means there is no paramount leader today in China *à la* Mao Zedong (毛澤東) or Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) who is not beholden to any electorate and can pretty much determine who can join him in the Party's top leadership. A Jiang Zemin (江澤民) or a Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) is vulnerable to political challenge arising from his peers in the Politburo or below when the time of political contestation draws near. This means greater sensitivity to the preferences of the high electorate when the top leaders are competing for the job of general secretary. Thanks to much greater political institutionalization, one can discern the critical junctures when political contestation and political succession will take place by following the schedule of the *lianghui*.[17] This suggests the political competition model in foreign policymaking is equally applicable to democracies in the United States and the ROC, as well as to the authoritarian system in mainland China.

If we shift to the international front, we find a most convenient analytical instrument in the strategic triangle framework.[18] Designed to capture

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[16]The high electorate suggests the top-echelon leaders who play a role in the political competition that determines the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Communist Party, the site of ultimate political power in mainland China.

[17]For the increasing political institutionalization of Chinese politics, see Yu-Shan Wu, "Jiang and After: Technocratic Rule, Generational Replacement, and Mentor Politics," in *The New Chinese Leadership: Challenges and Opportunities after the 16th Party Congress*, ed. Yunhan Chu, Chih-cheng Lo, and Ramon H. Myers, *The China Quarterly Special Issue*, no. 4 (March 2004): 69-88.

[18]Lowell Dittmer provides a seminal formal treatment of strategic triangles in a 1981 piece in *World Politics*, which lays the foundation for the future expansion of the model to other triangular situations. See Lowell Dittmer, "The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game-Theoretical Analysis," *World Politics* 33, no. 4 (July 1981): 485-516.

the roles and interactive patterns of triangular actors, this model provides a yardstick to evaluate the position of any particular player in a strategic triangle, and a theory that suggests possible moves to upgrade one's role in the triangle and explains players' actions of upgrading.[19] Originally based on the "great strategic triangle" of the United States, the Soviet Union, and the PRC during the Cold War,[20] this analytical framework gains wider usage when applied to the study of triangular interactions in any triad of nations that are primarily concerned with security.[21] As the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangular entanglement becomes increasingly clear, with each relationship affected by the other two relationships and also affecting them, the triangular model is applied to analyze the interaction in this triad.[22]

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[19]Interstate relations in the triangle are characterized as either amity (+) or enmity (−). This typology offers four types of strategic triangles: those with three amity relations ("*ménage à trois*"), two amities and one enmity ("romantic triangle"), one amity and two enmities ("marriage"), and three enmities ("unit veto"). In *ménage à trois* all players are "friends." In a romantic triangle two "wings" court one "pivot." The wings are at each other's throat, while the pivot maintains good relations with both wings. In marriage the "married couple" are "partners," while the odd man out is a "pariah." In unit veto all the three triangular players are "foes." Assuming amity with other players is better than enmity (assumption **A**), and enmity between other players is better than if they are in amity (because one fears collusion by other players against oneself) (assumption **B**), and finally assuming **A** is more important than **B** in determining preference ordering among all the six roles, then we have: pivot (1), friend (2), partner (3), wing (4), foe (5), and pariah (6), in declining order of desirability.

[20]See Gerald Segal, *The Great Power Triangle* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982); Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Collapsing Triangle: U.S. and Soviet Policies toward China, 1969-1980," *Contemporary Strategy*, no. 4 (1983): 113-46; Ilpyong J. Kim, ed., *The Strategic Triangle: China, the United States, and the Soviet Union* (New York: Paragon House, 1987); and Joshua S. Goldstein and John R. Freeman, "U.S.-Soviet-Chinese Relations: Routine, Reciprocity, or Rational Expectations?" *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (March 1991): 17-35.

[21]See, for example, Thomas L. Wilborn, *International Politics in Northeast Asia: The China-Japan-United States Strategic Triangle* (Carlisle, Penn.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1996); Ming Zhang and Ronald N. Montaperto, *A Triad of Another Kind: The United States, China, and Japan* (New York: Palgrave, 1999); Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Gilbert Rozman, "A New Sino-Russian-American Triangle?" *Orbis* 44, no. 4 (2000): 541-56; Go Ito, *Alliance in Anxiety: Détente and the Sino-American-Japanese Triangle* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and James C. Hsiung, "The Strategic Triangle: Dynamics Between China, Russia, and the United States," *Harvard International Review* 26, no. 1 (2004): 14-17.

[22]See, for example, Wu, *Kangheng huo hucong*; Alan M. Wachman, "America's Taiwan

The role of a pivot in a romantic triangle (one that keeps positive relations with both "wings" while seeing the wings compete with each other) carries particular significance in the triangular analysis. First, it is the role that ranks the highest among the six triangular positions. Second, it has been the role played by the United States in the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle since the Cold War ended. Whether the United States willingly took this position is questionable (hence the discussion of the "unwilling pivot");[23] however, the fact that it did play the role of a pivot between the two Chinese wings is clear. This particular triangular configuration (the romantic triangle) and the specific positions taken by the trio lay out a structure for the players, providing opportunities and constraints simultaneously. The United States can "tilt" to either wing to extract concessions from the other wing, while it also suffers from cross-pressure from the two wings. Mainland China and Taiwan compete for the favor of the United States, although both know their position in the triangle is not the ideal one and contemplate the possibility of "upgrading."

Up to this point we have shown the importance of both domestic and international factors in affecting cross-Strait relations and the relations in the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle, and suggested the political competition model and the strategic triangle theory as the best candidate theories to capture domestic and international factors. However, the two models are not compatible in their original form. We are still stuck with the question of what dimension, domestic or international, prevails in determining policies and relations in the triad. Specifically, if the requirements to take an advantageous position in the strategic triangle conflict with the need to capture maximum votes in domestic electoral competition, what

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Quandary: How Much Does Chen's Election Matter?" in Alagappa, *Taiwan's Presidential Politics*, 236-59; Alan D. Romberg, "Taiwan in U.S.-PRC Relations: A Strategic Perspective" (Paper presented at the conference on "U.S.-China Relations and the Bush Administration: A New Paradigm or Continuing Existing Modalities," Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, California, 2001); and David Shambaugh, "The Military-Political Dimension in the U.S.-China-Taiwan Triangle" (Paper presented at the conference on "Taiwan and U.S. Policy: Toward Stability or Crisis?" Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C., 2002).

[23]See Wu, "From Romantic Triangle to Marriage?" For a critique, see Jeff Oliver, "Ménage à Taiwan," *Foreign Policy*, no. 151 (November/December 2005): 88-89.

will the policymakers do?

The Sequential Model

We are now faced with a "multi-game" or "two-level" situation. Tsebelis suggests ostensibly irrational behaviors can be explained by exposing the nested games in which rational players find themselves.[24] His emphasis, however, is on party politics in Europe; hence he fails to shed light on the coexistence of the domestic and international games. For Kenneth Waltz, domestic factors (his second image)[25] should not be included in his form of structural realism, which strictly separates structural from nonstructural elements and excludes the latter from his model.[26] Waltz's emphasis on level of analysis, however, leads one to ponder how to bridge the gap between different levels, contrary to his advice. Efforts have been made in this regard,[27] including applying cross-level analysis to China-Taiwan relations.[28] Here we enter the realm of the two-level game, a concept pioneered by Putnam.[29] In applying Putnam's framework to

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[24]George Tsebelis, *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[25]Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954).

[26]See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

[27]For example, Peter Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics," *International Organization* 32, no. 4 (Autumn 1978): 881-911; Peter Gourevitch, "Squaring the Circle: The Domestic Sources of International Relations," ibid. 50, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 349-73; and Peter Evans, Harold K. Jacobson, and Robert Putnam, eds., *Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[28]See Hseik-wen Soong, "The Implications of Cross-Level Analysis on International Relations Theory," in *Zhengzhi fenxi de cengci* (Level-of-analysis effects on political research), ed. Hsu Yung-ming and Huang Chi (Taipei: Weber, 2000), 81-116.

[29]See, for example, Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomatic and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 427-60; Keisuke Iida, "When and How Do Domestic Constraints Matter? Two-Level Games with Uncertainty," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37, no. 3 (September 1993): 403-26; Jongryn Mo, "The Logic of Two-Level Games with Endogenous Domestic Coalitions," ibid. 38, no. 3 (September 1994): 402-22; and Jongryn Mo, "Domestic Institutions and International Bargaining: The Agent Veto in Two-Level Games," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 4 (December 1995): 914-24.

cross-Strait relations, Lin demonstrates both the usefulness and the limits of the original concept.[30] Putnam is most interested in knowing if the negotiated outcome falls in the "win-set" defined in domestic politics, and the possibility of reaching an international agreement under domestic constraints. Our primary concern, however, is the policies oftentimes taken unilaterally by the triangular players toward one another, and how those policies are geared toward domestic and international audiences. Obviously, we need an analytical framework different from Putnam's two-level game.

A more fruitful way to integrate the domestic and international dimensions of the relations in the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle is to synthesize the political competition model and the strategic triangle theory. As intense political competition tends to draw decision-makers' attention to the domestic impact of foreign policy, the dilution of competition after critical political junctures are passed tends to redirect attention to realpolitik, or strategic triangular relations among the three players in our case. This means there is a *sequential alternation between domestic and international games* following the political cycle of the country. When elections (or *lianghui*) draw near, the trio's policies reflect domestic politics and campaign strategies of the political competitors. When elections (or *lianghui*) are over and the leadership's position has been secured, then the trio's actions can be explained in terms of international realism. We shall call this a sequential model of Washington-Beijing-Taipei relations.

The sequential model actually presumes the supremacy of the domestic game over the international game; i.e., whenever domestic political competition intensifies, decision-makers swiftly shift to the domestic scene, and they do not return to the international game until the domestic competition is over and they have secured victory.[31] Such shifts between two games are rational, as only the winners in the domestic competition can play the international game. If you reverse the preference, i.e., let decision-

[30]Lin, "Two-Level Games Between Rival Regimes," 1-26.
[31]Wu, "Does Chen's Election Make Any Difference?" 155-92.

makers weigh the international game more than they weigh the domestic game and take actions accordingly, then they may end up losing the domestic game, and simultaneously be forced to exit the international game as they would then have no capacity to play. However, even when the decision-makers keep the preference "right," i.e., insist on winning the domestic competition first and then attend to the international game, there is no guarantee that the result will be desirable. It is possible that what is intended for domestic consumption will "spill over" into the international game, and disturb triangular relations to such an extent that the country's security and its position in the triangle are jeopardized. This may bring about international pressure so great that national leaders are forced to back up on their previous posturing, or may add to the difficulty with which national leaders shift back to the international game once domestic competition is over. It is not unimaginable that the "spillover effect" is so adverse that a country's vital security interest is jeopardized. This in turn will damage the national leaders' vital interest, as they hold fewer chips at the international table and may well end up losers. This, however, does not make them irrational. On the contrary, they are perfectly rational actors who try to maximize their power both domestically and internationally.[32]

What exactly are the implications of the sequential alternations of two different games in the U.S.-China-Taiwan triangle? Generally speaking, domestic competition prompts politicians to play tough in the international arena, for appearing weak vis-à-vis a foreign power easily invites criticism from one's political rivals. The nature of the emotion that politicians whip up in their campaigns may also lead to intransigence—be it nationalism or self-righteous idealism. After domestic competition is over the winners can attend to the international game. This is when one sees moderation. Campaign rhetoric is replaced by carefully calibrated diplomatic statements. Going moderate has a structural reason in a strategic triangle.

[32] I am here using the definition of rationality offered by Christopher H. Achen—i.e., people and states are rational when they consistently aim to maximize their preferences. See Christopher H. Achen, "Two-Level Games and Unitary Rational Actors," in Hsu and Huang, *Zhengzhi fenxi de cengci*, 37.

Given that the pivot is the most enviable position in the triangle, and the pivot by definition keeps amity with both wings, it follows that during inter-electoral (inter-*lianghui*) periods, triangular actors sense an inherent urge to improve relations with the other two players and move closer to the pivot position. In sum, we would generally expect hard-line policy during political competition and soft-line policy during inter-competition periods.

The sequential model assumes policymakers will shift between the domestic game and the international game following the political competition cycle of the country (**H1**). Foreign policy is for domestic consumption during periodic political competition and for international consumption when the competition is over. The sequential model also assumes domestic competition tends to harden policy, while the lack of such competition would soften it (**H2**). While **H1** is a core statement of the sequential model, **H2** is a derived one. One can imagine situations in which voters prefer moderation toward other triangular players, hence inducing all political competitors to demonstrate moderation. It might be because the target country fits voter preferences, or because voters are wary of the consequences of jingoistic agitation. This means political competition does not always lead to the hardening of policy. One can also imagine cool, realist considerations may not always yield to moderation. For example, if the pivot in a romantic triangle senses pressure from a rising wing, it may decisively tilt to the weak wing and form an alliance there. This would change the structure of the strategic triangle from romantic to marriage. Such a move would entail hardening of the pivot's policy toward the strong wing. In short, one can accept **H1** without accepting **H2**. We shall designate the "**H1** cum **H2**" position the *crude sequential model*, and the "**H1** without **H2**" position the *refined sequential model*.

Among the three players in our triangular game one expects to see clear vicissitudes of policy lines in the United States and Taiwan following their electoral cycles. As in both countries a president commands foreign policymaking, we should cast our focus on presidential elections. Interestingly enough, since 1996 the two countries have had their respective quadrennial presidential elections held within the space of eight months: Taiwan's in March and the U.S.'s in November. As for mainland China,

because of the authoritarian nature of its political regime, greater stability and continuity is expected, although *lianghui* (and particularly the *lianghui* that witnessed political succession) should also have an impact on Beijing's Taiwan policy and U.S. policy. This paper will apply the above analytical framework (the crude and refined sequential model) to study Washington's China policy since 1980, to see how it is alternately affected by domestic and international factors.[33]

The United States: Idealism vs. Realism

The sequential model is applicable to the United States, not least because of the strong idealist tradition in American foreign policy. This tradition was most clearly expressed in President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and his ideal of the League of Nations. Wilsonian idealism competes tenaciously with realism in the making of American foreign policy.[34] It is rooted in the unique historical development of the American state, which took the moral high ground as its point of departure. That ideal was first nurtured and protected by the seas that separate the new nation from the old continent.[35] The growth of the country into a world superpower in the twentieth century further equipped it with the capacity to act on its ideological beliefs, even at the expense of great material interests, a luxury no other countries in the world can afford. In short, history,

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[33]This is part two of a tripartite study of the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle. The Taiwan case has been analyzed by this author and thus will not be the subject of this paper. A study of how domestic politics impacts on mainland China's policy in the triangle will be the last leg of the tripartite study. The goal is to test and modify the sequential model and to improve on our ability to explain and predict developments in the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle. See Wu, "Taiwan's Domestic Politics and Cross-Strait Relations," 35-60.

[34]About the dichotomy of idealism vs. realism in the study of international relations, see Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1946); for a recent debate on this issue, see David A. Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[35]Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), chap. 1.

geography, and national power make idealism particularly strong in the United States.[36]

Nowhere is this dichotomy of idealism vs. realism more pronounced than in America's China policy.[37] For here the idealist repugnance against a dictatorial communist regime naturally clashes with the realist need to effectively deal with a rising superpower in the East.[38] As a rule, when idealism is strong, Washington takes a harsher view of Beijing's behavior and formulates its China policy accordingly. Since Taiwan is a kind of antithesis to mainland China, both before and after democratization on the island, a critical view of the PRC easily translates into a sympathetic attitude toward Taiwan. Then when realism is strong, Washington views the world through the eyes of a Henry Kissinger, and puts human rights considerations and democratic aspirations on the back burner. With that perspective, the status of the PRC easily stands out and demands Washington's recognition. The domestic situation on the Chinese mainland is then said to have little bearing on proper American policy toward it. Following this logic, Taiwan pales in strategic and economic importance when compared with China, and U.S. China policy swings to Beijing's side.

If America's position swings between Taipei and Beijing based on the balance between idealism and realism, then what determines the relative strength of the two schools of thought? Since the 1980s a rule has been gradually established that synchronizes the balance of power between idealism and realism and America's electoral cycle. When a presidential election approaches, all camps seek to mobilize voters with idealist ap-

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[36]Here we are referring to a liberal idealism. There can be other forms of idealism based on non-liberal thinking that constitutes the basis of the foreign policy of other countries.

[37]For a good portrayal of this dichotomy, see James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999); Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China, An Investigative History* (New York: The Century Foundation, 2000); and David M. Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001).

[38]For the rise of China in the international arena, see Yan Xuetong et al., *Zhongguo jueqi: guoji huanjing pinggu* (The rise of China: an evaluation of the international environment) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1997).

peals, using value language.[39] In this atmosphere, the China policy of the incumbent president is usually subject to criticism by his political opponents based in the Congress and in the press. This is the case because the incumbent president toward the end of his term has in most cases adopted a realist approach in his China policy, appreciating the need to respect the core interest of this rising power in exchange for its cooperation on issues vital to the United States. This stance makes the president vulnerable to criticism from his challenger. In order to meet those criticisms, the president is likely to take some actions to appease the idealists. If the incumbent wins (or his party's candidate wins if the incumbent has served two terms and cannot run), one should expect no great change in America's China policy. If he loses, then the new president will shift to a more hard-line policy toward Beijing, and will be a bit friendlier toward Taipei than his predecessor. However, it will not take long before realism again reigns and the new president will change course to reflect business and security interests of the country. Put in a nutshell, one should expect the rise of idealism and a downturn in Washington-Beijing relations when the American presidential election approaches. One should also expect the opposite development toward realism when the election is well over, and the next election is still far away. Elections force politicians to concentrate on domestic preferences, which always stress idealism. When relatively emancipated from electoral pressure, politicians are geared to international politics, and realism creeps back.

This is the crude sequential model, or **H1** cum **H2**. One can also make a case for the refined sequential model, i.e., **H1** without **H2**. Realism in itself does not necessarily conflict with idealism. Even though in the case of China the two strands of thought oftentimes collide, the changing

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[39] Fearful of such an intrusion of domestic politics into foreign policy, as the China policy debate in 1960 over U.S. involvement in Jinmen (金門)-Mazu (馬祖) showed, former presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, and former secretaries of state Dean Rusk, William Rogers, Cyrus Vance, Edmund Muskie, and Alexander Haig signed a petition drafted by Douglass Cater, a former White House aide, to the presidential candidates in 1984, warning them of the danger of overstatements concerning U.S. foreign policy in the campaign that might prove detrimental to the country's interest. See *Zhongyang ribao* (Central Daily News) (Taipei), April 1, 1984, 5.

environment may prompt alternative interpretations of the two thoughts so that they may converge at particular moments. This will occur when China is rapidly reforming, enchanting both the right and left in the United States, and making it criticism-proof even from the perspective of American idealism. Realist perception of China may also change over time. The rapid rise of China may prompt rearguard actions by the United States to contain it.[40] When the threat perception grows larger, the realist thinking that advised engagement, recognition, and partnership may gradually give way to hard-nosed policy. This means even with realism in command during the inter-electoral periods, the incumbent president may take a hard-line policy toward Beijing, thus thwarting criticisms based on idealism. In sum, it seems that when China carries a reforming image during elections, or when inter-electoral realism has already prompted the incumbent president to be harsh on Beijing, criticism of the administration's China policy may be muted during the presidential elections, and the impact of political cycles on the U.S. China policy is limited. This observation, however, does not detract from the basic assumption of the sequential model that the balance of power between idealism and realism is synchronized with electoral cycles. However, it does show that the crude version may not be able to capture the full picture, and some refining of the model is in order. In the following discussion, we shall examine the evolution of China policy throughout the seven presidential elections since 1980, and test the crude and refined versions of the sequential model.

When President Jimmy Carter swung to Beijing and dumped Taipei in 1979, he was vehemently attacked by the Republicans led by their presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, whose campaign rhetoric included re-recognizing the Republic of China.[41] After Reagan won the presidential

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[40]Even sometimes under the name of engagement, the thrust of the policy remains containment of the rising threat. See Chang Ya-chung and Sun Kuo-hsiang, *Meiguo de Zhongguo zhengce: weidu, jiaowang, zhanlue huoban* (The U.S.'s China policy: containment, engagement, strategic partner) (Taipei: Shengzhi, 1999).

[41]Reagan talked about reestablishing official ties with Taiwan, and setting up a liaison office in Taipei. He did backtrack a bit when the election drew near. See Mann, *About Face*, chap. 6; and *Report on Sino-American Relations: 1980-1981* (Taipei: Institute of American

election in 1980 there was high tension between Washington and Beijing, but the new president soon adapted to the reality and changed his course. In 1982 the August 17 Communiqué set limits to future U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, and in 1984 President Reagan visited the PRC. Reagan obviously was tamed by the logic of international politics, but not without first challenging the incumbent president with his fervent idealist appeal. All this was very well in line with the sequential model, which predicts exactly such changes of course by the successful presidential challenger.

The presidential elections in 1984 and 1988 did not witness great debate on China. The 1984 election saw Reagan seeking reelection and meeting a feeble challenge from the Democratic nominee Walter Mondale, the former vice president under Jimmy Carter whom Reagan had defeated in 1980.[42] The Mondale-Ferraro ticket was clearly a liberal one, and the campaign and the debates were primarily on economic and social issues. When it came to foreign policy, the concern was over nuclear weapons (scrapping SALT II and START), Iran (the legacy of the siege of the embassy), Lebanon (the bombings of the embassy and the slaughter of 241 Marines), and Nicaragua (the covert support of the Contras against the Sandinistas). The overall strategic picture in which all the above incidents found their place was that of a rising Soviet threat. The Republicans championed a steadfast military buildup (including Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, or Star Wars), while the Democrats worried about an unchecked arms race (Mondale's mutual nuclear freeze with the Soviets).[43] The debate was also on how much Washington could support its authoritarian allies and

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Culture, Academia Sinica, 1981), 3-8. In addition to Reagan, the Democrats in the Congress were understandably furious to be caught unawares by Carter's abrupt move. The result was the Taiwan Relations Act, which provided the necessary legal instrument to sustain unofficial bilateral ties between Washington and Taipei. The Democrats in the Congress, however, did not demand a reversal of course on China policy by the Carter administration, as did Reagan. In short, the bi-partisan attack on Carter's China policy reversal from the Congress paled in comparison with Reagan's attack on Carter.

[42]Reagan carried 49 states—525 electoral votes to Mondale's 10, and 59 percent of the popular vote. One-fourth of registered Democrats voted for Reagan.

[43]For the campaign theme and the debate between Reagan and Mondale in 1984, see "Debating Our Destiny: 1984," PBS News Hour, at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/debatingourdestiny/1984.html (accessed August 2, 2005).

anti-communist guerrillas without overly trampling on human rights and international law. China obviously benefited from this overall strategic picture by offering a counter-Soviet force in the East. It also benefited from the rapid economic reform and social change that Deng Xiaoping launched five years before, which presented China as exiting the communist model and embracing Western institutions. Reagan's 1984 visit to mainland China was designed to boost his status in this context.[44] Hence idealism was not antithetic to a reforming China, even during this hectic electoral season. Mondale did not raise the China issue to embarrass Reagan, for the context was not there, and thus there was no Reagan response in terms of his China policy.[45]

In 1988 the duel was between the Republican candidate, George Bush, on the incumbent side, and the Democratic challenger, Michael Dukakis, the governor of Massachusetts. Even more than the 1984 campaign, this one was centered on social and cultural issues, such as abortion, homosexual rights, prisoner furloughs, and capital punishment, rather than grand domestic and foreign issues.[46] The campaign was one of the most mean-spirited and negative campaigns in modern-day American political history. It was also one in which the leaving president's support played an unusual role in swaying the result. When it came to foreign policy, one saw a typical Republican-Democratic divide over the size of the military budget, the development and deployment of weapons systems (the MX system, Pershing missiles, Trident submarines, SDI, etc.), the building and testing of nuclear weapons, support of anti-communist authoritarian

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[44]Reagan even reconciled his longstanding anti-communist position and his visit to the PRC by referring that country as "so-called communist."

[45]Mondale did attack Reagan on the nuclear issue, and Reagan responded not just by defending his position but also by meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko at the White House on September 28. Although little progress was made at the meeting, it was to demonstrate that Reagan could talk with the Soviets and reduce tension, a gesture clearly aimed at Mondale's criticism that Reagan refused to negotiate with the Soviets to put a lid on the arms race. For our purpose, it shows how electoral politics directs the incumbent president to act in response to criticism.

[46]For the Bush/Dukakis debate, see "Debating Our Destiny: 1988," PBS News Hour, at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/debatingourdestiny/1988.html (accessed August 2, 2005).

regimes and Nicaraguan "freedom fighters," and U.S. direct intervention in Latin America, with Bush saying "yes" and Dukakis saying "no" to all the above. Dukakis was more pacifist than Mondale, while Bush stayed with the Reagan doctrine. The overall strategic picture had changed significantly in four years, with the Soviet Union on its way to transforming itself and its bloc into forms more acceptable to the United States and the West. As the process was just unfolding and nothing was certain, the American strategists were playing safe by cautiously watching the evolution of the Soviet "New Thinking."[47] They wanted to keep the special strategic relationship with the PRC. Beijing was thus able to keep good relations with both Washington and Moscow. The realist image of China remained positive. Idealism was also on China's side, for with all the ups and downs, the communist regime's reforms continued steaming ahead and Chinese society kept opening up to international society. The Americans noticed little of the growing tension between the communist regime and the Chinese people as reform deepened. The image of a progressive China persisted. Bush's strong personal ties with the top communist leadership in Beijing added further to the relationship. Again the convergence of realist and idealist interests seemed to assure the absence of the China issue in the presidential campaign. Like four years previously, the Democratic challenger failed to attack the incumbent's China policy on idealist grounds. The only time China became an issue in the campaign was when Dukakis defended the interests of American workers against the encroachment of imports from East Asian countries (economic patriotism). However, here the targets were multiple, and Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea ranked higher as unjust trading partners than mainland China. As Dukakis failed to criticize the administration over its handling of Sino-American relations, one found no response from the Bush camp in this issue. In short, the electoral cycle of 1988 failed to impact on U.S. China policy.

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[47]As Bush put it in his PBS debate with Dukakis, "The jury is still out on the Soviet experiment." See "Debating Our Destiny: 1998."

The Republicans won the 1984 and 1988 presidential elections, and there was no significant change in Washington's China policy in those years. These were the "golden years in Sino-American relations."[48] Even the most dramatic eruption of protests in China in 1989 did not bring about an immediate reorientation of Washington's attitude toward Beijing (the impact was to be felt later).[49] In fact, the tenacity with which President Bush stuck to his friendship with Deng Xiaoping and his sending of a secret mission led by National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft to Beijing to guarantee continuation of bilateral relations right after the crackdown demonstrates great policy consistency.[50] A major change in U.S. China policy occurred only when the next presidential election approached. Before the election campaign kicked off, the Tiananmen Incident (天安門事件) and the negative image of China that the media helped create were not strong enough to force President Bush to reformulate his time-honored pro-Beijing policy.

The 1992 presidential election impacted on Washington's China policy in a way similar to the 1980 election. Instead of America's betrayal of a longtime ally, this time it was the brutal crackdown on student demonstrations in Beijing and the subsequent disillusionment with the Chinese communist regime that prompted the attack on Bush's China policy. In his campaign, Democratic challenger Bill Clinton criticized Bush for kowtowing to Beijing's Tiananmen butchers. Clinton wanted the United States to exert influence over China to make it improve on its human rights, to recognize the legitimacy of student demonstrations, to open up its society, and to stop exporting products made with prison labor. He ridiculed Bush's decision to send Scowcroft to toast the Chinese leaders and tell them not to worry about the Tiananmen massacre. He also linked most-favored-nation (MFN) status with human rights issues. In rebutting Clinton, Bush insisted

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[48]See Mann, *About Face*, chap. 7.

[49]On President Bush's China policy, see Strobe Talbott, "Post-Victory Blues," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 1 (1991/1992): 69.

[50]See Alan Tonelson, "Prudence or Inertia? The Bush Administration's Foreign Policy," *Current History* 90, no. 558 (1991): 311-16.

that he was engaging China, and that Clinton's policy would amount to isolating China and ruining Hong Kong.[51] Bush's conservative realism made him stick to a special Sino-American relationship as a pillar of U.S. foreign policy, and Clinton as a challenger found it convenient to attack Bush on idealist grounds. What separated the 1992 situation from 1984 and 1988 was that the Tiananmen suppression had made the American people disillusioned about the nature of the Chinese communist regime. Unlike in the previous two presidential elections, idealism now worked against Beijing. Clinton behaved as expected in the sequential theory by attacking Bush in moral language and making a political point. In order to deflate Clinton's criticism and show support for a democratic Taiwan, and also to win support from a defense industry stricken by the end of the Cold War, Bush approved the sale to Taiwan of 150 F-16 fighters, which was unprecedented.[52] Obviously, the China issue became an important one in the 1992 presidential election, and America's political cycle had an impact on its China policy.

Clinton won the 1992 presidential election, and Sino-American friction ensued just as it had when Reagan defeated Carter in 1980. Again like Reagan, Clinton swiftly adapted to the international environment and began to promote business relations with mainland China. The MFN was de-linked from human rights issues in 1994. However, as the presidential election of 1996 approached, Clinton made an attempt to appease his Congressional critics by approving a U.S. visa for the ROC President Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), who was coming to receive an award from his alma

[51] For the Bush/Clinton/Perot debate, see "Debating Our Destiny: 1992," PBS News Hour, at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/debatingourdestiny/1992.html (accessed August 2, 2005).

[52] Bush also did the same for Saudi Arabia by announcing on his campaign trail to St. Louis that he had approved a lucrative contract for McDonnell Douglas to build F-15s for the Saudis. In the presidential debate, Bush justified his decision by saying this would create jobs for the American people. The F-16 deal with Taiwan was likewise motivated, to win votes among those who might be adversely affected by the scaling down of the defense budget in the post-Cold War era. An alternative explanation has it that the Bush administration had sensed the need to beef up Taiwan's air force to redress the imbalance of power in the region, and they positioned the announcement on the campaign trail so as to create the impression that electoral politics was the driving force behind the move, making it easier for Beijing to accept the deal.

mater, Cornell. That move was made in the context of overwhelming Congressional support for President Lee's private visit. What occurred then was totally unexpected from Washington's point of view. The PRC retaliated not only by cutting military ties and suspending cooperation programs with the United States in many areas; it also conducted missile tests in the Taiwan Strait in a clear attempt to influence the ROC's first direct presidential election. The United States was forced to send carrier combat groups to the Taiwan Strait, and Washington-Beijing relations sank to an all-time low.

The 1996 presidential election saw Clinton challenged by Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, the Republican nominee. The campaign was not a lively one, as Dole proved a weak challenger. On the domestic side, Dole attacked, while Clinton defended, the Democratic administration's economic record. As the U.S. economy was making a strong recovery, such debate was to Clinton's advantage. On the foreign policy front, Dole criticized Clinton for stationing more American troops overseas than any previous president, and for not being able to command support from allies when taking military action (missile attacks on Iraq). Clinton defended his record by pointing out peace in Bosnia, agreement in Ireland, and the restoration of democracy in Haiti as his achievements. When inaugurated in 1993, Clinton was inexperienced in foreign affairs, while Dole was a veteran senator; hence Dole focused his attack on Clinton's foreign policy, or his lack of it. However, it turned out that Dole was not successful in putting together a foreign policy package that he could contrast with Clinton's reactive, improvising policies.[53] On the China/Taiwan issue, Dole was in no position to criticize Clinton, for the president had sensed the need to heed mainstream Congressional opinion and had issued a visa to Lee Teng-hui in 1995 and then sent the U.S. fleet to the Taiwan Strait to deter a PRC attack on the island. In 1996, China had lost its progressive image and become vulnerable to attack in the U.S. presidential election.

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[53]For the Clinton/Dole debate, see "Debating Our Destiny: 1996," PBS News Hour, at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/debatingourdestiny/1996.html (accessed August 2, 2005).

However, Clinton was immune from criticism because he had preempted the issue by distancing himself from Beijing. An otherwise highly probable idealist attack on Clinton's China policy in 1996 was defused by the president a year earlier. However, the net effect of the 1996 presidential election on U.S. China policy was in line with the sequential model: it took an abrupt anti-Beijing, pro-Taipei turn.

If the presidential election of 1996 provided the background for an American tilt toward Taiwan, then Clinton's winning the election proved instrumental in his launching a major campaign to reestablish close ties with mainland China.[54] The exchange of state visits by Clinton and Jiang Zemin in 1997 and 1998, the establishment of the "constructive strategic partnership,"[55] and Clinton's utterance of the "new three no's" all pointed to the direction of renewed amity between Washington and Beijing.[56] However, as the 2000 presidential election drew near, new tension arose in the United States between the candidates, and Clinton's China policy was under severe attack. It was like a replay of the 1995 events, when euphoria was followed by sudden shocks and U.S.-PRC relations took a nosedive. In 1995, the catalyst was issuance of a visa to Lee; in 1999, it was the TMD and the NATO bombing of the PRC embassy in Belgrade that touched off the vicious cycle. Anti-American feelings surged high in the PRC, while the American side complained about the abuse of human rights, arrests of dissidents, the stealing of nuclear technology, illegal political contributions, the military threat to Taiwan, and other grievances. At the bottom of all these developments was the American electoral cycle. Zhu Rongji's (朱鎔基) visit to the United States in April 1999 and the huge concessions he offered was a bold counter-cyclical move, and yet it failed to reverse

[54]For arguments favoring such a reorientation, see Ezra F. Vogel, ed., *Living with China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

[55]For Beijing's perception of these developments, see Su Ge, "Shijimo guoji xingshi zhanwang: guoji geju yu Meiguo guojia anquan zhanlue" (Prospects of international situation toward the end of the century: international structure and U.S. national security strategy), *Zhongguo pinglun* (China Review), no. 14 (February 1999): 8-10.

[56]For the implications for Taiwan, see Xiong Jie, "Ershiyi shiji Zhongguo tongyi qianjing yuce" (Predictions on the prospects of Chinese unification in the twenty-first century), *Zhongguo pinglun*, no. 14 (February 1999): 60-64.

the tide.[57] Taiwan benefited from the deterioration of Washington-Beijing relations as the Congress became more concerned with Taiwan's security, disregarding Beijing's fury.

The 2000 campaign was conducted in the above context. George W. Bush, the Republican nominee, criticized Clinton's foreign policy as being on the soft side (Somalia, Iraq, Yugoslavia, etc.), while Vice President Al Gore, the Democratic nominee, attempted to navigate between his allegiance to Clinton and the need to appear tough on foreign policy issues when debating with Bush.[58] Clinton's entry into strategic partnership with China was challenged by Bush who declared that the United States and the PRC were strategic competitors. Bush's tough talk was a reflection of not only campaign rhetoric, but also his personal conviction.[59] There was also a realist reflection of the changing balance of power and mainland China's rise to challenge American dominance in East Asia. China since Tiananmen had been subject to criticism by presidential nominees from opposition parties as they mounted attacks on the incumbent president's realist China policy. Bush's criticism of the Democratic administration on this was well predicted in the sequential model.

During the presidential campaign Bush repeatedly stressed American national interest as his sole yardstick in foreign policy. He was against Clinton's "partnership" with Beijing not just on idealist, but also on realist grounds. His intellectual mentor on foreign policy, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, was famous for a realist perspective and an un-

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[57]Zhu knew that he would meet with difficulties in his visit to the United States, that he would be an unwelcome visitor, but he was still willing to make the trip to enhance mutual understanding. See "An Interview with China's Zhu Rongji," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 1999, A23.

[58]For the Gore/Bush debate, see PBS News Hour, "Election 2000," at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/election2000/debates/1st-index.html (accessed August 2, 2005).

[59]Bush couches his belief in democratic values in religious terms and understands the world via a Manichean dichotomy. Making no secret of his own religious conviction that the world is engaged in a moral battle between good and evil, Bush has peppered his speeches with biblical language and imagery. In Bush's dichotomous perception of the world, mainland China suffered as a mammoth communist dictatorship, while Taiwan benefited as a democratic nation facing an overwhelming threat from the PRC.

swerving pursuit of American interests.[60] An idealistic proclivity was found neither in Vice President Dick Cheney nor in Secretary of State Colin Powell.[61] In fact, in view of the limited idealistic surge in the Gore-Bush duel, the new president's turn to blatant realism was more readily made than was Clinton's shift in 1993-94. However, realism meant different things this time. While Clinton was harsh on China in his 1992 campaign for idealist reasons, and his turn to realism led to much closer relations with Beijing, in 2000 Bush Junior invoked less idealist opposition to China in his campaign, while his emphasis on realism after winning the presidential race heightened his resolve to check China's rise. With Clinton the shift from high-sounding idealism to realist concerns brought about better relations with Beijing, while with Bush the shift from limited moral critique of the Chinese regime to realpolitik ushered in conflict between the world's hegemon and East Asia's emerging giant. Realism means different things at different times.

In February 2001, President George W. Bush was inaugurated. As Bush's China policy was taking shape, the EP-3 incident (in which a U.S. Navy plane was forced to land on Hainan Island [海南島] and its crew detained and interrogated) took place. As encounters of this kind occurred in the past only between the United States and the Soviet Union, the April 2001 incident easily put the PRC in the same "enemy number one" category reserved for the Soviets during the Cold War era.[62] Soon after the incident,

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[60]Condoleezza Rice once wrote that "American foreign policy in a Republican administration should refocus the United States on the national interest," and that "There is nothing wrong with doing something that benefits all humanity, but that is, in a sense, a second-order effect." CNN Allpolitics, "Exceeding Expectations, Rice Returns to White House in Top Job," http://www.cnn.com/2000/ALLPOLITICS/stories/12/17/rice.profile.ap/index.html (accessed December 31, 2000). An expert on the Soviet Union, Rice was plucked from academia in 1989 by Brent Scowcroft to serve on the National Security Council of former President Bush, where she helped shape U.S. policy during the tumultuous time of the Soviet Union's collapse.

[61]For a discussion of the Bush entourage, see James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004).

[62]There was a similar incident in 1968 when Soviet MiG fighters intercepted a Seaboard-World Airlines DC-8 and forced it to land on Etoforu Island, part of the disputed Kurile Islands chain. On board the plane were 214 Vietnam-bound troops, heading for a refueling stop at Yokota. Intense negotiations between Moscow and Washington for the release of the airliner ensued. After receiving an apology from Washington, the Soviets let the

President Bush announced his unconditional support for Taiwan in the event of any PRC invasion of the island.[63] This "whatever it took" statement was an unprecedented pledge of defense for Taiwan, an articulation that contrasted sharply with Clinton's China policy.[64] Bush's pledge was followed by his approval of large arms transfers, improved military cooperation, greater leeway for Taiwan leaders visiting the United States, and repeated rhetorical support of Taiwan—all unprecedented moves by a U.S. president.[65] The administration's Quadrennial Defense Review unmistakably saw the PRC as a potential threat in Asia; U.S. ballistic missile defense programs severely challenged China's nuclear deterrent and intimidation strategy against Taiwan; at the same time, rising U.S. influence and prolonged military deployments were at odds with previous Chinese strategy. Although showing good will in areas of common ground, the Bush administration has demonstrated very strong determination to defend U.S. security interests, most notably regarding Taiwan.[66] U.S.-Taiwan

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crew leave. The EP-3 incident looked like a replay of the 1968 incident. See Dave Ornauer, "EP-3 Incident Similar to Forcing down of U.S. Plane by Soviets in 1968," *Stars and Stripes*, April 6, 2001, at http://ww2.pstripes.osd.mil/01/apr01/ed0406011.html (accessed May 1, 2001).

[63]Asked in the ABC interview if Washington had an obligation to defend the Taiwanese in the event of attack by China, which considers the island a renegade province, Bush said: "Yes, we do ... and the Chinese must understand that. Yes, I would." When asked whether the United States would use "the full force of the American military," Bush responded, "Whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself." http://edition.cnn.com/2001/ALLPOLITICS/04/24/bush.taiwan.abc/ (accessed April 25, 2001).

[64]According to Kenneth Lieberthal, director of Asian affairs at the National Security Council during the Clinton administration, "This (statement) clearly does go beyond what any previous administration has indicated either orally or in writing." Lieberthal said that Bush's initial statement even went beyond a U.S.-Taiwan defense pact that was abrogated as one of the fundamental preconditions to establishing formal U.S. relations with Beijing in 1979. See *The Washington Post*, April 26, 2001, A01.

[65]Bush also mentioned "the Republic of Taiwan" by name on April 4, 2002, when he called on the U.S. Senate to pass trade promotion authority. He stated: "··· that's important to recognize and to welcome both countries, both the Republic of Taiwan, and of course China, into the World Trade Organization." One may interpret this as a slip of the tongue on Bush's part, and yet it is quite obvious that in his mind both Taiwan and China are independent countries, with equal status. See "President Calls on Senate to Pass Trade Promotion Authority," http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020404-4.html (accessed April 4, 2002).

[66]Robert Sutter, "Grading Bush's China Policy: A-," *PacNet Newsletter*, #10 (March 8, 2002), http://www.csis.org/pacfor/pac0210.htm (accessed April 1, 2002).

relations have reached a height unprecedented since the break of diplomatic ties in 1979.

The September 11 terrorist attack and the resultant war on terror did not change the profile of Washington's new China policy. Washington has ardently sought Beijing's support in its global effort to fight terrorism, but has not used Taiwan as a bargaining chip. Taiwan has been defined as a vital U.S. security interest.[67] From 2001 through 2004, Washington has consistently "advised" Taiwan to buy more defensive weapons. Even though the United States has claimed that it was merely responding to the defense requests that Taiwan made in the 1990s, under the Bush administration there was a sea change in American attitude from reluctant and restricted approval to vigorous advocacy of arms sales to Taiwan. In addition to arms sales, military cooperation in various forms (personnel training, intelligence sharing, professional advising, the setting up of a hot-line, etc.) intensified to the extent that Beijing now considers Taiwan a quasi-ally of Washington and an instrument of American domination in the region.[68]

As realism functioned to direct the Bush administration toward a harsher reassessment of the potential threat from a rising China, and a friendlier consideration of Taiwan's defense needs, Bush behaved like Clinton in 1995-96 in sufficiently distancing himself from Beijing and prevented competitors in the presidential race from attacking him on the China issue. Even though Bush did come up with harsh words about President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) in front of mainland China's Premier Wen Jiabao (溫家寶), the statement was made in the context of an overall American policy that opposes "any unilateral decision by either China or Taiwan to change the status quo."[69] The American president was carefully balanced

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[67]As can be clearly seen from the first meeting between Bush and Jiang Zemin in February 2002 at which Bush was steadfast in declaring his commitment to the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). Bear in mind that this was only five months after September 11 and the United States was in great need of Chinese support in the war on terror and for the U.S. position on Iraq and North Korea.

[68]See "U.S. Taiwan Acts Jeopardize Ties," *China Daily*, May 29, 2002, http://www.china.org.cn/english/FR/33439.htm (accessed September 28, 2004).

[69]Bush said this in response to a question about the planned referendum in Taiwan. He

between his disapproval of Chen's flirting with independence and his warning to China against any possible military moves. As Bush's statement was being made, the United States continued deepening its military-to-military ties with Taiwan, showing where Washington would lend its ultimate support when push came to shove.

In this context the 2004 presidential election witnessed no serious debate on Bush's China policy. No one can charge Bush with being too pro-Beijing, or with failing to take care of Taiwan's defense needs. Actually the Democratic challenger, Senator John Kerry, showed a more pro-Beijing attitude when he kept open the option of "one country, two systems" for Taiwan.[70] In the foreign policy debate, Kerry's criticism of Bush's policy centered on the president's unilateralism (war in Iraq, sanctions against Iran), his sending mixed messages (North Korea, nuclear proliferation), and his making the country weak by overextending its military capabilities. Bush's rebuttal came in the form of ridiculing Kerry's changing positions on Iraq.[71] During this exchange, China was mentioned mainly in the context of the six-party talks, which Bush considered vital in defusing the looming nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula. Again, Bush's assertion that mainland China had leverage over Kim Jong Il and should play an important role in the six-party talks did not come at

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continued, "And the comments and actions made by the leader of Taiwan indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally, to change the status quo, which we oppose." See William Branigin, "U.S. Reaffirms 'One China' Policy: Bush Cautions Taiwan as He Receives Chinese Premier Wen at White House," *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2003. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A49366-2003Dec9.html (accessed December 10, 2003). It is interesting to note that one cannot deduce from these statements that Bush has reneged on his "whatever it took" promise, i.e., there is no logical contradiction between Bush's previous defense promise to Taiwan and his opposition to Taiwan independence.

[70]Kerry suggested in January 2004 during a radio interview with six other Democratic candidates that the "one country, two systems" model could be implemented in Taiwan as a solution to the cross-Strait impasse. In a less noticed reversal of position in October, Kerry noted that the "'one country, two systems' model can't be replicated for Taiwan" in an exclusive interview with the *Sing Tao Daily* conducted by written exchanges. See Joy Su, "MAC Welcomes Kerry's Comments about Taiwan," *Taipei Times*, October 30, 2004, at http://taiwansecurity.org/TT/2004/TT-301004.htm (accessed December 1, 2004).

[71]For the Bush/Kerry debate, see PBS News Hour, "Vote 2004," at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2004/debates/first.html (accessed August 2, 2005).

Table 1
Patterns of Attack on China Policy

	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Republican	Ronald Reagan	Ronald Reagan	George H.W. Bush Senior	George H.W. Bush Senior	Bob Dole	George W. Bush Junior	George W. Bush Junior
China policy as an issue	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Direction of attack	↓	n/a	n/a	↑	n/a	↓	n/a
Democrat	Jimmy Carter	Walter Mondale	Michael Dukakis	Bill Clinton	Bill Clinton		John Kerry

Jimmy Carter: Incumbent Democratic president

: Candidate from the incumbent Democratic Party

Ronald Reagan: Incumbent Republican president

George W. Bush Senior: Candidate from the incumbent Republican Party

John Kerry: Challenger from the opposition party

Taiwan's expense.

We can now take a look at the record of the intervention (or lack of it) of electoral politics on China policy in the United States after Carter normalized relations with the PRC (and de-normalized relations with the ROC) in 1979. Two patterns appear immediately. During presidential elections, either there was an attack launched by the opposition candidate on the incumbent president's China policy, or there was no such attack. The direction of the attack was always from the opposition against the president. On other occasions China was not an electoral issue. The most prominent cases of China policy attack were by Reagan (1980), Clinton (1992), and Bush (2000). There was no attack by Mondale (1984), Dukakis (1988), Dole (1996), and Kerry (2004) (see table 1). The crude sequential model would predict the attack, but cannot explain the lack of it. One naturally wonders what factors account for the two different patterns, and how one can refine on the crude version of the sequential model.

Refining the Crude Sequential Model

The crude sequential model identifies idealism and realism as the two main competing forces in U.S. foreign policy, and synchronizes the shifting balance between the two with the electoral cycle. It is argued that whenever elections draw near, idealism surges, but when elections are over, then realism regains ascendancy. The mechanism for the alternative rule of idealism and realism is electoral competition and vote maximization: during elections, politicians tend to mobilize voters by invoking their cherished values and attacking the opponents in high-sounding moral language. When elections are over and the winners are declared, then there will be no use for idealist talk, but every reason to pursue realpolitik. Applied to the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle, this means players will pursue hard-line policies when they face political competition at home, and shift to soft-line policies when domestic competition is over and they can get down to real business and play the triangular strategic game. This is the crude sequential model.

As shown in table 1, the crude sequential model correctly predicts the opposition candidates' attack on the incumbents' China policy in 1980, 1992, and 2000. However, it fails to explain the lack of such attack in other presidential elections since normalization. By reviewing all the seven presidential elections since 1980, we find the core of the crude sequential model—i.e., **H1**—sustainable. However, its derived argument **H2** needs correction.

The fundamental assumption of the crude sequential model is that electoral cycles determine the relative power of idealism and realism. Elections empower idealism because voters are much easier to mobilize with value language, and presidential candidates have to compete for voters' ears. After the race the winning elite easily creeps back to elitist strategic thinking: they no longer need to pay heed to voters' preferences. This part of the crude model is sustainable. However, the model further assumes idealism leads to hard-line policy, while realism brings about rational and moderate policy. Whether this is always the case is actually questionable.

The crux of the matter is the relationship between particular strands of thought (idealism or realism) on the one hand, and the image of China and the China policy inspired by the thought on the other. As the record shows, the American political imagination of China changes over time, in part reflecting the transformation of that country since normalization, in part revealing how human perceptions are punctuated by critical events and how those events are reported.[72] There are three idealist images of China: a *totalitarian-communist* state, a *progressive-reformist* nation, and an *authoritarian one-party regime*.[73] When Carter entered formal diplomatic relations with Beijing, the first image still loomed large. The second image dominated the 1980s, forming the basis of the "golden years of Sino-American relations."[74] This image change occurred shortly after Deng's reforms got fully under way in the early 1980s. However, the image of a progressive China was shattered by the Tiananmen Incident of 1989. The country then took on the image of an authoritarian one-party regime in the 1990s. Overshadowed by Tiananmen, the Americans again sensed the differences between their country and China. Those differences were not as huge as when mainland China was under Mao's rule, but remained considerable. In short, idealist images of China changed over time, and so did the attitude of the general public toward that country (see table 2 and figure 1).

The realist side of the picture is juxtaposed with the idealist side and shown in table 3. The United States first viewed China as a useful counterforce against the Soviet Union, as a junior partner in the great

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[72]See Carola McGiffert, ed., *China in the American Political Imagination* (Washington, D.C.: The CSIS Press, 2003). Events are powerful in shaping popular perceptions, and the media play an important role in portraying events in specific ways, hence creating images that reflect the values of the media. However, in order to be politically significant, events and media portrayal have to enter the political process by being invoked and used by political actors. This is where electoral competition and partisan politics enter the picture. Events and the media alone cannot shape policies. In this paper we concentrate on the political process, leaving events and the media out as exogenous factors, without denying their importance.

[73]Those images are idealist because they reflect the liberal democratic values of the American people. They are the images of China for an idealist American.

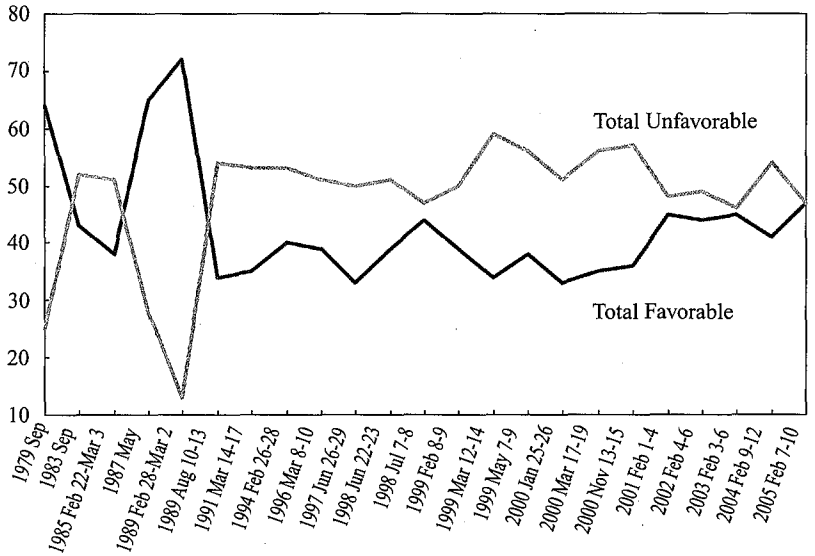
[74]Mann, *About Face*, chap. 7.

Table 2
Fluctuation of China's Image

Period	Idealist image	Total favorable %	Total unfavorable %
1983~89: Pre-Tiananmen	Progressive-Reformist	54.5	36.0
1989~99	Authoritarian One-Party	37.5	52.4
2000~	Authoritarian One-Party	40.8	51.0

Sources: Based on twenty-three Gallup polls conducted from 1979 to 2005. Total favorable = very favorable + mostly favorable. Total unfavorable = very unfavorable + mostly unfavorable.

Figure 1
Fluctuation of China's Image



Sources: Based on twenty-three Gallup polls conducted from 1979 to 2005.

strategic triangle. That was the prime reason behind the recognition of the PRC in 1979. During the 1980s, the threat from the Soviet Union first rose, and then rapidly declined. The role of Beijing also shifted from that of a *junior partner* to a *pivot* (in 1982), then to a *friend* (in

Table 3
Idealist/Realist Images and Attack on China Policy

	Late 1970s	1980s		1990s	2000s
Idealist image	Totalitarian-Communist	Progressive-Reformist		Authoritarian One-Party	
Derived policy	Negative	Positive		Negative	
Realist image	Junior Partner	Pivot	Friend	Wing	Wing → Outcast
Derived policy	Warm	Warm	Warm	Lukewarm	Lukewarm → Cold
Attack or no attack	▲ 1980 Carter vs. Reagan	▲ 1984 Reagan vs. Mondale	▲ 1988 Bush vs. Dukakis	▲ 1992 Bush vs. Clinton	▲ 1996 Clinton vs. Dole	▲ 2000 Gore vs. Bush	▲ 2004 Bush vs. Kerry

1985).[75] In all those years, even though the usefulness of China as a strategic asset gradually declined, it remained vital in the minds of the American leaders who were deep in their Cold War thinking. In policy terms, this means Washington had to keep a *warm* relationship with Beijing for strategic reasons. As a result, Taiwan was left high and dry, in total isolation, surviving on the impressive economic performance of the island and politically opening up toward the end of Chiang Ching-kuo's (蔣經國) rule. The final dissolution of the Soviet Union changed the strategic structure in which Washington, Beijing, and Taipei found themselves. A rising China was gradually viewed with suspicion by the United States in the 1990s. The 1990s was a decade of unprecedented growth for both the United States and China. It became increasingly clear that as U.S. hegemony was being consolidated in that decade, the China threat was looming on the horizon. U.S. strategic thinking in the 1990s reflected this trend, torn between adopting containment or engagement as the better strategy for dealing with a rising China. Because of the change in the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle, Beijing became a *wing*, as well as Taiwan, competing for American endorsement and recognition. The rela-

[75] See note 19 above.

tionship between Washington and Beijing was at best *lukewarm*. Finally, with Bush's election as president, and particularly with the EP-3 incident, the United States clearly came to perceive the PRC as a strategic threat. In the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle, the United States has tilted toward Taiwan, undeterred by President Chen's flamboyant pro-independence remarks. China's role in the triangle is now between a wing and an outcast, for the United States has shown some signs of abandoning its pivot role to ally with Taiwan. The strategic relationship between Washington and Beijing has turned from *lukewarm* to *cold*. As the idealist image of China changes over time, the strategic image of China also alters, prompting different strategic responses from the United States.

Now we can put the idealist and realist images of China together to form the context in which the U.S. presidential elections took place. The 1980 election was held with China still holding a totalitarian-communist idealist image, while its realist image was as a junior partner with the United States against the common enemy, the Soviet Union. The two images were inconsistent, with the realist image prompting Carter to recognize Beijing, and the idealist image leading Reagan to attack Carter's China policy. In both 1984 and 1988, the idealist and the realist images of China converged. The country was considered progressive-reformist, and strategically important for Washington as a pivot and then as a friend. That is why the Reagan-Bush realist line did not meet a challenge from Mondale in 1984 or from Dukakis in 1988. Four years later the picture was entirely different. The Tiananmen Incident completely shattered China's progressive image. It fell into the abyss of an authoritarian one-party regime. On the strategic front, the Soviet Union had just collapsed and President Bush had not responded to the dissolution of the great triangle and viewed China in its own light, i.e., not in light of the Soviet Union. Beijing still held a special place in Bush's engrained strategic thinking. The PRC's idealist and realist images diverged, prompting the presidential challenger Clinton to attack Bush for kowtowing to the butchers of Tiananmen.[76]

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[76]When the idealist and realist images of China point in the same direction (positive-positive

In the 1990s, the idealist-realist divergence continued. Anticipating the pressure on him over the China issue, Clinton made a preemptive move in 1995 to grant a visa to Lee Teng-hui, touching off the missile scare and confrontation between the U.S. fleet and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the Taiwan Strait. This conflict with China exempted Clinton from any possible Republican attack in the 1996 campaign, but the impact of the presidential election on U.S. China policy was as predicted: it took an anti-Beijing turn. In 2000, one saw the PRC's authoritarian one-party image lingering while its strategic position in the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle was about to fall from wing to outcast. The Clinton administration was still undecided over containment/engagement, thus keeping relations with Beijing lukewarm. This provided Bush with good reason to attack the Democrats' China policy, again on idealist grounds. After Bush assumed power, the United States clearly sensed the rise of mainland China as the sole challenger to American hegemony in the foreseeable future. In the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle, this meant a tilt toward Taiwan. Because idealist and realist images of China had converged, the Democratic challenger Kerry in 2004 could not attack Bush's China policy on idealist grounds: the president had been playing tough with Beijing.

The above analysis provides a general framework, an idealist/realist image background for the pattern of attacks on the incumbent's China policy during presidential elections. It dismisses any fixed relationship between the evaluation bases (idealism/realism), the derived images (idealist images and realist images), and the policy preferences (positive/negative, warm/lukewarm/cold) (**H2**). America's idealist tradition and the realist calculation of its policymakers may remain the same (**H1**), but China

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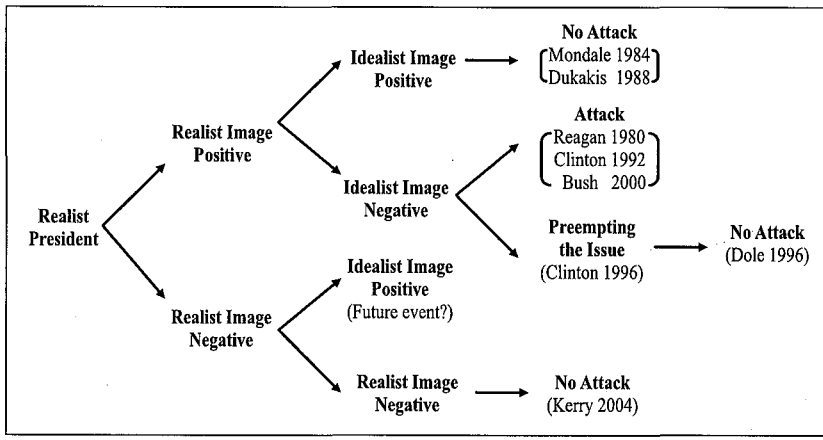
or negative-negative), we declare that the two images converge. When they point in opposite directions (positive-negative or negative-positive), then we say the two images are divergent. Here convergence/divergence is defined in terms of the relation between the idealist and the realist images, both of which are in turn defined in typological terms: totalitarian-communist, progressive-reformist, or authoritarian one-party for idealist image, and junior partner, pivot, friend, wing, or outcast for realist image. This is thus a typological, rather than a quantitative, analysis.

Figure 2
Attack, or Not to Attack



can have different idealist images (totalitarian-communist, progressive-reformist, authoritarian one-party) and realist images (junior partner, pivot, friend, wing, outcast), and one has to look at specific moments to determine the combination of the two images and then to analyze the incentives for the presidential challenger to attack the incumbent's China policy. This is the refined version of the sequential model. It obviously can offer a better explanation of the impact of electoral politics on the United States' China policy.

We can theorize on the challenger's decision to attack or not to attack the incumbent's China policy. As shown in figure 2, we begin with a realist president. His China policy is basically decided by the realist image of that country. Let us first take a look at the upper branch. If China has a positive realist image (pivot, partner, wing, or friend), then the president's policy would be pro-Beijing. We then move to the idealist side. If China also has a positive image there, then the two images converge and reinforce each other. The president does not have to be worried about being attacked by his political rival during a presidential election, for there are no idealist grounds to base that attack on. The examples are: Mondale (1984) and Dukakis (1988). If the positive realist image is coupled with a negative

Table 4
Attack Patterns over Time

	China's idealist image	
China's realist image	Positive	Negative
Positive	1980s	1980, 1990s, 2000
Negative	n/a	2004

idealist image, then the president can either stick to his realist policy, thus risking attack by his opponent, as in Carter vs. Reagan (1980), Bush Senior vs. Clinton (1992), and Gore vs. Bush Junior (2000); or the president can preempt the issue by being tough with Beijing, thus thwarting any attack on his China policy, as in Clinton vs. Dole (1996).

Now we can move to the lower branch. If China has a negative realist image, while its idealist image is positive, then the president would also be in trouble, for his realist China policy (play tough) will be inconsistent with the popular image of that country. This situation has not arisen, but theoretically one cannot exclude such a possibility. If mainland China becomes democratic and meets American value preferences, while the country continues to grow economically and militarily, then this scenario may arise. If China's negative realist image is coupled with a similarly negative idealist image, then the two images converge, and the political opponent to the president cannot attack the president's China policy. The example is Kerry (2004).

Attack or no attack is determined by whether the realist policy of the president is consistent with the idealist expectations of the voters. In the following two-by-two (see table 4), one sees the only box where we have attack is on the upper right, where China's negative idealist image meets its positive realist image. That was basically the situation in the 1990s, as well as in 1980. The upper left is the 1980s, when the two images were both positive, hence no attack. The lower right box again finds convergence of both images, but on the negative side. This was the case in 2004. The lower left box has no empirical case. Attack is possible only when the realist and the idealist images of China diverge, and when the president

does not preempt the issue.

Conclusion

We start with an interest in the interaction of domestic and international factors in determining relations and policies in the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle. We concentrate on the United States and find its China policy alternately determined by domestic political competition and international strategic games. The mechanism is electoral competition that changes the incentives of the policymakers. The crude sequential model argues that elections always prompt a challenger's critique of the incumbent's China policy, and result in the hardening of such policy, while inter-electoral stability always brings about moderate, rational China policy, aimed at gaining an advantageous position in the strategic triangle. The refined sequential model points out the inadequacies of the crude theory in not being able to explain why in four out of seven presidential elections since 1980 there was no attack on the incumbent's China policy. In this way, the refined version improves on the crude version by more adequately dealing with historical data from the seven presidential elections since 1980. We thus cast off simplicity in favor of a sophisticated frame of explanation that can better integrate the complex empirical evidence at hand.

The refined sequential model sees the combination of China's idealist and realist images as key to understanding the attack pattern on the incumbent's China policy. The refined version keeps the basic assumption of the sequential model that realism and idealism take turns to determine Washington's China policy. However the new theory points out that China's realist and idealist images can change over time, hence there is no fixed relationship between idealism and realism on the one hand, and the China policy inspired by the two strands of thought on the other. After examining the seven presidential elections since 1980, it is found that only when China's idealist and realist images diverge, and when the incumbent president fails to preempt the issue, will there be an attack on his China policy.

The refined sequential model also points to the possibility of mainland China meeting the idealist expectations of the American people while growing into a strong military and economic power. In these circumstances, one may find the idealist and realist images of the country diverging again, this time making it possible for the presidential challenger to accuse the president of adopting a too hostile policy toward China. Whether this scenario will materialize depends on the permutations of China's two images in the future.

In this paper we did not touch on Congressional elections and their impact on U.S. China policy.[77] We assume that the impact of Congressional elections on China policy would be less than that of presidential elections, since it is the president who is the ultimate arbiter of foreign policy. We have also not investigated the role played by the Congress during presidential elections with regard to China policy: our focus being exclusively on the role of the presidential challengers. Although one cannot neglect the role of the opposition party in Congress, during presidential elections it is the challenger who leads the attack on the incumbent president. Furthermore, different members of Congress have different agendas, and their criticism of the president may not cohere, unlike the presidential challenger who has to come up with a policy package of his own. That being said, it would be extremely interesting and important to investigate the role played by Congress on this issue, probably together with the presidential challenger, in presidential elections.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, we are interested in investigating the interaction of domestic and international factors in the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle. This paper's focus is the United States and its China policy. In later research, we shall integrate the findings of this paper with those from studies on Taiwan and mainland China on the same issue, i.e., the impact of domestic politics on triangular policies. We expect to arrive at a comprehensive explanatory framework that can address the

[77] For the importance of the role of Congress in China policy, see Robert Sutter, "Congressional Pressures and U.S.-China Policy," *Foreign Service Journal* 82, no. 5 (May 2005): 24-29.

issue in all the three countries, and advance our understanding of the dynamics of the Washington-Beijing-Taipei triangle.

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